

O Holy Birth-Giver of God, Save Us!

Youth Group Session One

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You have probably heard a lot about the Virgin Mary. We use her name often during the Divine Liturgy. Can you think of a time when you hear her name during the liturgy? Write them here.

We also use many other names that you may have heard such as “Theotokos” and “Birth-giver of God”. Theotokos means “god bearer” in Greek and in Ukrainian we say “Bohorodichen”. Here is how you would say “Birth-giver of God” in other languages:

Arabic – Walidatu-le-elaah

Romanian – Sfanta Nascatoare de Dumnezeu

Luganda (Uganda) – Nnyina Katonda

Georgian - Ghmrtisnshobeli

You have probably heard many other names used to describe Mary. But who is she? Let us read page one in our textbook “The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children” to learn more.

You have probably heard many other names used to describe Mary. But who is she? Let us read pages 2-5 in our textbook “The Illustrated Life of the Theotokos for Children” to learn more about Mary’s life and how she prepared to become the Mother of God.

Who are Mary’s parents? _____

As we read, Joachim and Anna were very sad about not having any children. The people in their town did not treat them nicely. How do you think that they felt?

Did their unhappiness stop them from worshipping God and being thankful for what they had? No, it did not. They continued to look to God and His mercy.

We would consider the birth of Mary a miracle. Why? Her parents were very old and were told they could not have children. The angel coming to Joachim and telling him of the birth of his daughter gives us a vision of the future that she will be special.

Why do you think St. Andrew of Crete said that the Nativity of Mary “is for us the beginning of all holy days”?

The birth of Mary, the Theotokos, is also the beginning of the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With the intervention of God to answer the prayers of Joachim and Anna, we see how Mary will begin to intercede for those in need...beginning with her parents!

Our textbook tells us that the Nativity of Mary is celebrated on September 8th each year. This is on what is called the New Calendar or the Gregorian Calendar. This is the calendar that we use everyday at school and at home. Pope Gregory created the Gregorian Calendar in 1582. He created this calendar because the old calendar that was created in 46 BC by Julius Caesar was not quite perfect.

Our daily calendar in life today follows the Gregorian Calendar. However, many Orthodox Churches (for many reasons) have chosen to still use the Julian Calendar. Our Holy Ukrainian Orthodox Church is one of those churches. You may have friends who are from Greek, Antiochian or other Orthodox churches who celebrate feast days and holy days on different days than you do. This does not mean that we don't all belong to the same Orthodox Church – we just use different calendars!

There is one time during the year when all Orthodox churches follow the same calendar (Julian Calendar) and that is from the beginning of Great Lent until Pentecost.

The Nativity of Mary is celebrated on September 21st for those who follow the Julian or “Old Calendar”.

Your textbook shows an icon of the Nativity of the Theotokos on page 4. You will notice that Mary is held in the arms of a nurse who is taking care of St. Anna. What do you notice about Mary?

Iconography does not always just show us the exact story. Sometimes they also teach us special things about the church. For example, Mary does not look like a baby in this icon because we are taught that Mary was already full of wisdom when she was born. God gave her this knowledge. So instead of being shown as a baby, she is shown like a small woman. Not all icons of the Nativity are written in this way.